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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [AL](#)
SUBJECT: WHAT HAPPENED TO G-99?

REF: A) 08 TIRANA 774 B) TIRANA 160

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN L. WITHERS II FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

1.(C) Despite all the hype surrounding Erion Veliaj's G-99 political party (reftels), G-99 fell flat on Election Day. G-99 failed to win a single seat in parliament and in fact won fewer than 13,000 votes out of over 1.5 million cast. Veliaj, however, remained upbeat in a recent meeting with Poloff; although he said it was "incredulous" that so many Albanians would vote for PM Sali Berisha. Veliaj also refused to criticize SP Leader Edi Rama and the SP campaign strategy. He blamed several factors for his loss and, while he genuinely appeared down, he does not count himself out of the game, noting that Abraham Lincoln lost 16 elections before becoming President.

12. (C) As for lessons learned, Veliaj said he may have spread his campaign and resources too thin. Acknowledging that he campaigned in every region in Albania, he said this was likely a wrong move and he should have concentrated on a few select regions. Veliaj also said he may have misread Albania's youth and their impact on elections; he said that many young people still live at home and their parents have considerable sway over their lives, and therefore their votes. He also claimed that Erion Brace, an SP candidate in Berat, "sabotaged" many of his votes by colluding with Electoral Commissioners to count G-99 votes as SP votes. Veliaj said Berat was one of the G-99,s strongest regions, but he said Brace urged locals not to vote for G-99 and even actively campaigned against Veliaj. He said it was a mistake to not raise this issue with Rama earlier. He added that thousands of ballots for G-99 were deemed ineligible for various reasons and while he did have observers during the counting, he did not have enough to watch all the tables simultaneously.

13. (C) Comment: The urbane Veliaj, not yet 30, was optimistically predicting to win 3-5 seats throughout the campaign and had a solid organization tactically but his message failed to resonate with voters. One SP strategist called G-99 a "failure of vision" and repeated the oft heard mantra of "what is this 'G-99'?" He clearly made some wrong decisions and overestimated the weight of his message. Veliaj though does seem to have learned many valuable lessons from the campaign, but demurred when asked about future plans. He retains a small army of devoted volunteers, many of whom he recently took to Croatia for a weekend retreat and pep rally. Many observers think that when he joined the SP coalition, his odds of winning a seat were reduced to zero since he began to be seen as an opportunist, rather than someone who wanted to promote real change. He also lost the individuality his party had had with this decision. Furthermore, the new Electoral Code did not help his cause either as it tends to favor larger parties. Despite this setback, Veliaj remains very well connected and we likely

have not heard the last from him.

WITHERS